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1. America: Lad of Opportunity

America is known as the land of opportunity, where one could achieve anything they put their mind to, no matter who they are. Thousands of people immigrate to the United States every year from different parts of the world to have access to these kinds of opportunities. This is what is known as "the American dream". One of the many reasons America is such a great country is the diversity you see all around. America is one big melting pot of citizens from different backgrounds.

America is also home to many of the world's top colleges and universities. The California Institute of Technology is a top world-ranked college that focuses highly on science and engineering. It is located in the city of Pasadena. Harvard University is another top world-ranked college that you might be familiar with. The buildings at Harvard date all the way back to the year 1636, making Harvard the oldest university in the United States. It is located in the state of Massachusetts. University of California, Los Angeles is another institute worthy of recognition. Located next to Hollywood, UCLA has distinguished itself as a prestigious and selective university due to the number of people who apply for admission throughout the United States. The universities mentioned are but a few of the many other excellent schools that make the United States so outstanding.

America is also known for being at the forefront of freedom and equality. Although our history may be contradictory to these ideals, we have progressed and now live in a land of equal opportunity. Whether you wish to become a doctor, a lawyer, or a librarian, America is the best place to be at to achieve these dreams.

2. The Fourth of July

The Fourth of July is the United States' celebration of its independence from England. It is the day when the Declaration of Independence was adopted by the new country's forefathers, and is a national holiday. It has been celebrated every year since 1776. Americans hold this day as one of the most revered holidays in the country.

Independence Day celebrations include firework shows that are held by various organizations throughout the country. The shows are held at stadiums, recreational parks, and private homes. Additionally, many businesses have giveaways and special discounts for all residents on this day. The firework shows are best at stadiums, where they attract a large number of people. This is a recent change in the way Americans celebrate the day. In the past, most people bought their own fireworks from vendors who sell their goods in supermarket parking lots.

Another Fourth of July tradition is the backyard barbeque. The holiday occurs in the middle of summer, and Americans love to grill outdoors to avoid the heat inside the house. Hamburgers and hot dogs are the food of choice, but steaks are also prepared often. There is nothing better than a great American meal and a cold drink celebrating the Fourth of July. It is a popular holiday, and it is one that has great meaning to most Americans.

3. The U.S. Federal Government

The United States government is composed of three major sections. It is based on the Constitution of the United States of America that was put into effect in May, 1789. The three parts of the U.S. Government are the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Each branch works independently of the other two, and each has its own responsibilities. This system is in place to ensure that no branch can carry more power than the other. This is called the separation of powers, which was written into the Constitution.

The executive branch is the branch that most Americans are familiar with. It includes the president of the United States, the vice-president, and the cabinet. The president is the leader of the country and is the commander-in-chief of the U.S. military. The vice-president is second-in-command, and will act as president if the president dies, resigns, or is removed from office.

The cabinet acts as agents of the U.S. President, and carry out the duties they are entrusted with.

The legislative branch of government consists of the House of Representatives, and the Senate. Together they form the congress, which can levy and collect taxes, mint money, and establish federal courts. It can also declare war, and raise and support the army, navy, and air force to protect the country. The House of Representatives has 435 members, and the Senate consists of 100 senators, with two from each of the states. Any legislation, or new law, must be approved by both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

4. Christmas – A holiday of Traditions

Christmas, observed on December 25, is a Christian holiday that celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ. Christians of different denominations go to church on Christmas. Many Catholics go to midnight mass. In the United States, however, the holiday has a much more secular tone, and is celebrated throughout the country. Many people, regardless of their religion, put up and decorate a Christmas tree. The tree can be a real evergreen or it can be an artificial tree. Lights, strings, tinsel, and even popcorn can be used to decorate a Christmas tree. On the top of the tree is a star or an angel. The decorations are usually red and green.

The purpose of a Christmas tree is to have a central location to place gifts. According to legend, a jolly fat man with a beard, named Santa Claus, leaves presents under the tree. Children in the U.S. often write lists of things they want Santa to bring them. Many parents bring their children to shopping malls across the country to tell a man dressed as Santa what they want. These children are often also photographed with the mall Santa as a keepsake. On Christmas Eve many children leave milk and cookies for Santa. Of course it is the parents that buy the gifts from the wish lists, and even eat the cookies and drink the milk. On Christmas Day children usually wake up early and run to the tree so they can see what Santa brought them. Adults can also exchange gifts at this time.

People don't just decorate a tree at Christmas. Many also elaborately decorate their homes with lights. Some of the displays are even synchronized to Christmas songs called carols. Originally these songs were religious, but now they are about the spirit of the season.

5. New Year's Day – A Holiday of New Beginnings

New Year's Day officially begins as soon as people yell "Happy New Year" at midnight. Most people continue partying well after midnight into the wee hours of the first day of the new year. In fact, many New Year's parties include breakfast or brunch.

Sometimes at the stroke of midnight there will be fireworks and couples often kiss. One of the most famous New Year's celebrations takes place in New York City's Time Square, where a huge cut crystal ball drops at midnight in front of millions of people standing in the cold. Many more millions watch on television. Some groups, called Polar Bear Clubs, jump into the cold ocean water on New Year's Day as a literal way to start the new year fresh.

New Year's Day, January 1, is a national holiday in the United States. This means that schools, banks, government offices, and post offices are closed. Given how much people tend to drink alcohol on New Year's Eve, many people wake up on New Year's Day with a hangover. The national holiday is a good day to recover.

Many people go out partying with their friends on New Year's Eve; many people use New Year's Day to visit family members. New Year's Day is also when many people start on their New Year's resolutions. A resolution is a promise to change a lifestyle habit. The most common resolution is to lose weight. Many people also join gyms as part of their resolutions.

On New Year's Day there are also parades such as the famous Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena, California, where all the floats are made of different colored roses and they compete for awards. Many people also watch college and professional football games, including the Rose Bowl, which is also held in Pasadena, California.

6. Martin Luther King Jr. Day – To Remember a Civil Rights Leader

The third Monday in January is an American federal holiday, Martin Luther King Jr. Day. It falls near the birthday of the civil rights leader, who was assassinated in 1968. King, a minister, became known for non-violently protesting the treatment of African-Americans in the United States and laws that discriminated against Blacks. Specifically, King protested segregation that separated blacks and whites in public restrooms, public pools, public schools, on buses, and at restaurants.

King led many marches in the United States, especially in the South where segregation was especially practiced and enforced, and in Washington D.C. His march on Washington D.C. was perhaps his most famous one, where he gave the "I have a Dream" speech.

On Martin Luther King Jr. Day, federal, state, and local offices are closed, including public schools and post offices. On the holiday many people participate in marches and vigils remembering Dr. King. Others use the day as a day of service and volunteer in their community by cleaning up garbage in a local park or serving food to the homeless. However, the holiday was controversial. Some states didn't want to honor Dr. King and tried to rename the holiday or combine the day with another holiday.

Only two other people have a U.S. national holiday, Christopher Columbus and George Washington. Martin Luther King Jr.

Day became a holiday in 1983 after pressure from civil rights activists and marches, similar to the ones King used to lead. Efforts to create a King holiday began the same year King was killed. The first state to recognize King Day as a holiday was Illinois. The last state to recognize the holiday was Arizona.

7. Valentine's Day – A Holiday of Love and Friendship

Valentine's Day, February 14, is a holiday that celebrates love and friendship in the United States. Most people think of it as a romantic day to show the one you love how much you care by purchasing cards and gifts. Valentine's Day is also an extremely commercial holiday.

People spend money on flowers, balloons, chocolate, stuffed animals, and jewelry. People also go out for expensive dinners. Valentine's Day is even celebrated by school children, who give thank-you cards to their teachers. Some high schools have Valentine's Day dances. Classmates give each other little cards.

These cards can be purchased at any store with famous cartoon characters. It is considered much more thoughtful to have kids make handmade cards to give to friends and teachers.

Valentine's Day is also a great day to announce your love to someone like a secret crush. Some people even get married on Valentine's Day.

However, you don't have to be in love to share in the festivities. You can say "Happy Valentine's Day" to friends and coworkers.

Valentine's Day is not an official holiday though in the U.S., meaning government offices and schools are open as usual. The date used to be the celebration of a Saint named Valentine who allegedly saved a young girl's life. It wasn't until the Middle Ages that romance somehow got mixed in with the date and lovers would send each other handwritten love notes. Back then you couldn't just go to the store and buy a card the way you can now. You know Valentine's Day is around the corner when stores begin to decorate with red and pink hearts and the symbol of Cupid, a winged ancient Roman god said to strike the hearts of people. Now it seems Cupid goes straight after your wallet because you will also see many more jewelry ads as Valentine's Day approaches. y – A Holiday of Love and Friendship.

8. St. Patrick's Day – A Holiday to Celebrate the Irish

Saint Patrick's Day, March 17, is a Christian religious holiday that celebrates the patron saint of Ireland. According to the legend, St. Patrick drove all the snakes out of Ireland. St. Patrick's Day has also become, especially in the United States, a day to celebrate Irish culture. In major cities across the country like in New York and Boston, there are parades and festivals.

People wear green and decorate with shamrocks, a type of three-leaf clover. Some people wear buttons or tee shirts that say "Kiss me, I'm Irish". In the U.S. St. Patrick's Day is not a legal holiday, meaning government offices and schools are open.

The biggest and oldest parade takes place in New York City. It actually began about 250 years ago before the U.S. was even its own country. Every year thousands gather along to watch hundreds of Irish step dancers and bagpipe players march. Irish step dancing is done in groups or solo. Dancers perform complicated moves with their feet and legs while keeping their upper bodies stiff. The parade has also been a source of controversy because the parade is associated with the Catholic Church in New York City; gay and lesbian organizations have not been allowed to march. Many people protest the parade or boycott it.

St. Patrick's Day has also become associated with the drinking of a lot of alcohol, specifically beer. One drink that is often seen around the holiday is "Green Beer". This is really just regular beer with green food coloring. Many people feel like the holiday celebrates stereotypes about the Irish, like the myth that they all like to drink and get drunk. Others complain that the holiday has become too focused on drinking, with public drunkenness as a problem in major cities around the holiday.

9. Passover – A Jewish Holiday of Remembering

Passover is a Jewish holiday that remembers and celebrates their liberation from ancient Egyptian slavery as described in the Old Testament of the Bible. It is traditionally celebrated in the spring and lasts about a week.

According to the story in the Bible, God punished ancient Egypt with 10 plagues. The last plague killed Egyptian first-born males. Jewish people were told to mark their doors with lamb's blood so that God would know to pass over these houses and not kill any first-born males inside. This is where the name of the holiday, Passover, comes from. After this last plague the Egyptian king, known as the Pharaoh, agreed to release the ancient Jews from bondage. The Bible story also says that the Jewish people left their homes in such a rush after they were freed that they didn't have time to wait for the bread to rise. This is why at the commemorative Passover meal, Jewish people eat matzo, bread without yeast, also known as unleavened bread. The matzo and other foods are eaten at a special meal called a seder.

There are very specific rituals that happen at the Seder meal. These rituals are all in a book called the Haggadah. Inside the Haggadah is also the story of the Jewish exodus from Egypt. During the seder meal parts of the Haggadah are read aloud. The first part of the meal is a blessing over wine. The second part of the meal is the washing of hands. The third part of the

meal is when someone dips some sort of vegetable in salt water and then eats the vegetable. The vegetable symbolizes the humble origins of the Jewish people. The water symbolizes their tears. The fourth part of the meal is when three pieces of matzo are broken.

10. Easter – An Important Christian Holiday

Easter is a Christian holiday that celebrates the resurrection of the dead of Jesus Christ as told in the Bible. Christians are found in church on Easter. Some Christians participate in an Easter vigil or nighttime mass, sometimes held by candlelight. Easter is never on a set date. It is observed on a Sunday between the end of March and the end of April. The exact date is calculated based on a different calendar. Many public schools in the U.S. have a week-long vacation around Easter time. Sometimes this break is called Easter or Spring break.

In the United States, Easter is also celebrated as a secular holiday. It is associated with the beginning of spring and symbolized by bunnies, flowers, and dyed eggs. Many children in the U.S. believe in a fictional character called the Easter Bunny. According to the myth the Easter Bunny leaves baskets full of candy for children. Sometimes these baskets are hidden and the children have to find them on Easter Sunday morning. Candy that is usually inside an Easter basket can include chocolate in the shape of bunnies or chicks, jellybeans, and marshmallows.

Another activity associated with Easter is an Easter egg hunt. According to popular mythology, the Easter Bunny hides painted eggs and children need to find them. While real eggs used to be used, now it is common to use plastic eggs filled with candy. There are usually public Easter egg hunts in parks across the country. The White House even hosts an Easter egg hunt. Another Easter tradition associated with Easter is dying real eggs in different, usually pastel, colors like light pink, blue and yellow.

In New York City, people take to Fifth Avenue to participate in the Easter Parade. The Easter Parade isn't a parade with marching bands and floats. People walk up and down Fifth Avenue showing off elaborately decorated hats or Easter bonnets.

11 Mother's Day – A Holiday to Honor Motherhood

Mother's Day is a holiday that celebrates and honors mothers in the United States. It is celebrated on the second Sunday in May. It became an official holiday in the country at the start of the 20th century as a way to honor mothers whose sons had died in war.

The holiday is celebrated in a number of ways. People give mothers gifts like flowers, cards, and jewelry to thank them for all their hard work. A popular symbol of the holiday is the carnation.

This is because when the holiday first began in the U.S. people were encouraged to wear a red carnation if their mother was alive or a white carnation if their mother was dead. Many people take their mothers out for a special meal. In fact, Mother's Day is the most popular date in the U.S. for people to go out and eat and it is estimated that people spend billions on meals and gifts. Mother's Day is also the most popular day to make long distance calls in the U.S. It is the second most popular gift-giving day after Christmas.

Since its establishment, Mother's Day has been criticized for becoming highly commercialized. In fact, the founder of the U.S. holiday, Anna Jarvis, began protesting the holiday and was even arrested for disturbing the peace for demonstrating. Jarvis's own mother started the campaign to establish a mother's holiday during the American Civil War.

Mothers are not the only people celebrated on this day. All mother figures including grandmothers, great-grandmothers, stepmothers, and foster mothers are honored on the holiday. In schools many students make special gifts, including handmade cards. While widely recognized, Mother's Day is not a federal holiday. Many other countries around the world have their own version of Mother's Day.

12. Father's Day – A Holiday to Honor Fatherhood

Father's Day is a holiday observed in the United States to honor fathers, fatherhood, and other paternal figures like grandfathers, stepfathers, and uncles. It is observed on the third Sunday in June.

In the early 20th century there was a mining accident in West Virginia that killed almost 400 men.

A push for a day to remember the men killed, who were mostly husbands and fathers, was the start of a push for a national holiday. This was in 1908. It wasn't until 1972, however, that Father's Day was recognized by law as a national holiday. This is due in part to the fact that people were resistant to what they saw as another overly invented holiday meant to just make people spend money. It wasn't seen as a way to remember the dead or to honor living fathers and father figures. People weren't entirely wrong. Organizations representing men's clothing manufacturers put in a lot of money for the holiday to become popular.

Like Mother's Day, it indeed is a holiday that has become highly commercialized. There are greeting cards to mark the day, and stores advertise gifts for Dad. These gifts traditionally include electronics, ties, and tools. In schools, children often make cards and other gifts. Father's Day is not a federal holiday even though it is widely celebrated. Some of the ways Father's Day is celebrated is with meals, especially barbecues since the holiday falls at the beginning of the summer.

13. Memorial Day – A Holiday to Remember Fallen Soldiers

Memorial Day is a United States holiday to remember the men and women who have died while serving in the armed forces. The armed forces include all branches of the U.S. military. Those branches are Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, and Coast Guard. Memorial Day is a federal holiday, which means government offices, banks, post offices, and schools are closed. Memorial Day is always observed on the last Monday of May.

Memorial Day has its roots in the U.S. Civil War when a holiday, Decoration Day, was established to honor both Union and Confederate soldiers who died. On Decoration Day people used to "decorate" the graves of deceased soldiers with flags and flowers. The name Memorial Day became more widely used after World War II in the late 1940s. However, the holiday wasn't officially called Memorial Day until 1967.

Memorial Day is commemorated by ceremonies in cemeteries across the country. The most well-known one is held in Arlington National Cemetery near Washington D.C. Arlington is a military cemetery, meaning only military personnel are buried there. Volunteers place U.S. flags on military graves at Arlington and other national cemeteries. There are also parades in honor of fallen service people held in different towns and cities. Another Memorial Day tradition is flying the U.S. flag at half staff until noon, meaning it is flown at half its normal height.

This is considered a sign of mourning. The flag is raised to its full height after noon as a sign that the military will rise up despite the loss. There is also a national Memorial Day concert that takes place on the lawn of the U.S. Capital.

Memorial Day is also known as the unofficial start of the summer season. Many beaches and pools open up for Memorial Day weekend. Many people also host barbecues on Memorial Day weekend.

14. Labor Day – A Holiday to Honor Workers

Labor Day is observed on the first Monday of September. It is a holiday meant to honor the contributions, both economic and social, of U.S. workers. It has been an official federal holiday since 1894, meaning that government offices including post offices and schools are closed.

It is also widely thought that Labor Day was created as an alternative holiday to May Day. May Day, especially in the 1800s, had become a protest day, when workers marched to demand better rights and working conditions. There were often strikes that ended in violence. At the time, the U.S. government was afraid that May Day was being led by communists and was having a bad influence on workers. Some people feel September was also chosen since there are no other holidays between Fourth of July and Thanksgiving in November.

On Labor Day there are usually parades in major cities around the country. Politicians and labor leaders make speeches and hold press conferences. Labor Day is also considered the unofficial end of summer. Many people celebrate Labor Day with trips to the beaches, picnics, and barbecues. Many towns and cities host fireworks on this day. Many people also take their last summer vacations around this time. Labor Day is also the beginning of the professional and college football season in the U.S.

Labor Day has also become an important retail holiday. Many stores have Labor Day sales to coincide with the start of the school year for many children in the U.S. This means that many store workers, while their holiday is being celebrated, have to work long hours.

15. Columbus Day –A Holiday to Remember an Explorer

Columbus Day is observed on the second Monday of October in the United States, and in some other countries around the world. For a long time it was observed on a specific date, October 12. It is named after Christopher Columbus, the Italian sailor who led three Spanish ships to claim new lands in 1492. There is even a child's poem remembering the date. It reads, "In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue". Some people say Columbus "discovered" North America, although not everyone agrees with this interpretation. For example, Columbus never landed on North America proper. He only got as far as to the islands in the Caribbean Sea.

Columbus Day has been a federal holiday since 1937; government offices, schools, and post offices are closed. Many Italians take the day as a day to celebrate their own ethnic heritage since Columbus was born in Genoa, Italy. Columbus's explorations, however, were conducted in the name of Spain. Major cities, like New York City and San Francisco, host large parades. Some cities, like New York City, also hold a parade celebrating the Hispanic or Latino community.

Not everyone thinks Christopher Columbus should be honored. Some states like South Dakota do not observe the holiday at all. Instead they call the day Native American Day or Indigenous Peoples Day. In Hawaii the holiday is also known as Landing Day or Discoverer's Day. This is because European arrival in North America meant the loss of land and lives for many Native people. Many people hold protests or vigils on this day to remember the Native Americans that were killed or enslaved as a result of the European arrival. Another name for the holiday is "Dia de la Raza" which translates into English as Day of the Race.

16. Halloween – A Holiday for Costumes and Candy

Halloween is on October 31. It is also called All Hallows' Eve or All Saints' Eve. This is because, according to some, the holiday has its roots in a Christian holiday that remembers the dead.

Others say the holiday has its roots in the ancient harvest season traditions of Ireland. In the U.S. though, the focus is less on memories of the dearly departed or agriculture. It is about kids dressing up in scary costumes and going door-to-door asking for candy. This is called trick-or-treating. When children knock on the door of a house or ring the doorbell, they usually say "Trick or Treat". The "trick" part is a fake threat signaling that the kids will commit a prank if they aren't given something delicious. Homeowners then give the children candy, raisins, or some other food treat. Many homeowners decorate their houses to prepare for the holiday and let kids know that they are participating and can ring the bell for candy. Traditional decorations often include jack-o'-lanterns, which are pumpkins with faces carved into them and candles inside. Jack-o' lanterns were thought to scare away evil spirits when Halloween was first celebrated among the ancient Christians. Also turnips, not pumpkins, were originally used. People often decorate using the colors black and orange.

Halloween is not just for kids; adults get in on the fun by attending costume parties. There are often contests for who has the best costume. There are also games bobbing for apples, where people have to get an apple using only their teeth from a large bucket of water. Other people celebrate by scaring themselves by going to haunted houses, homes where people dressed up as ghosts, zombies, and werewolves and jump out to frighten guests. People also tell scary stories or watch horror movies.

17. Veterans Day – A Holiday Honoring All Soldiers

Veterans Day is an official United States holiday observed on November 11th every year. While Memorial Day remembers those who have died while serving in any of the branches of the U.S. Armed Forces -- Army, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard, Veterans Day honors all members of the armed forces, especially the living. As a U.S. federal holiday, government offices and schools are closed, and most people have the day off from work. Banks are also closed. If November 11th falls on a Sunday, then the holiday is observed on the following Monday.

The holiday was first observed after World War I, which ended On November 11 1918. It was called Armistice Day then and was more about celebrating the absence of war and honoring those that served in that one war. It didn't become known as Veterans Day until 1954 after World War II and the Korean War, when there were many more members of the armed forces.

Many restaurants offer free meals to veterans on the date. There is always a special ceremony at Arlington National Military Cemetery in Washington D.C. This ceremony involves a wreath being placed over the grave of The Unknown Soldier. Many major cities also hold parades on this date. The U.S. flag is usually flown at half-mast as a remembrance to those soldiers who have died and many ceremonies observe a moment of silence for the same reason.

In Canada the holiday is called Remembrance Day. One symbol of the day is the poppy flower. The red poppy flower is said to represent or be a symbol of the blood of soldiers. Many people wear or give out poppy flowers on the day.

18. Chanukah – A Holiday of Lights

Chanuka, which can also be spelled as Hanukkah, is an 8-day Jewish holiday. It is known as the Festival of Lights, which celebrates the dedication of an ancient Jewish temple in Jerusalem thousands of years ago. According to the Hebrew, or Jewish Bible, a miracle took place then. A one-day supply of oil miraculously lasted eight days. The dates of Hanukkah always change, but usually occur anywhere in late November to Late December.

The main way people observe the holiday is by lighting a candle on a candelabra, a special candle holder with space for 9 candles on each of the 8 nights. This candelabra is called a menorah. Now there are also electric menorahs. Some people also use oil lamps. The 9th candle space is usually higher than the others and is lit on every night. This 9th candle is there so that people can see the other candles they are lighting. So, two lights are lit on the first night, three on the second and so on. Some families have the head of household light the candles. Other families share the responsibility.

The menorah is supposed to be placed somewhere visible like in a window facing the street. The candles are supposed to stay lit for at least 30 minutes after it gets dark. There are also special prayers people say and holy songs sung when the candles are lit.

Schools and government offices are open for Hanukkah since the observances happen at night. Some families exchange gifts on each night of the holiday. Some foods traditionally eaten on Hanukkah include latkes, fried potato pancakes, and doughnuts. These and other fried foods are eaten because they are cooked in oil and remind people of the oil that lasted for 8 nights. Children play with a special four-sided spinning top called a dreidel.

19. Thanksgiving – Families Coming Together

Thanksgiving is a holiday celebrated by many people in the United States and Canada. In the United States it is celebrated on the fourth Thursday in November and marks the start of the Christmas season. Some people celebrate Thanksgiving to remember the first harvest of the pilgrims and puritans, groups of people from England who immigrated to North America in the 1600s. Some people recreate the first Thanksgiving and dress up as pilgrims, puritans, and the Native Americans who are said to have helped the new arrivals find food to survive their first winter.

Most people, however, see Thanksgiving as one day a year to reflect upon what they are thankful for. Some families will sit together and take turns

saying aloud what they are thankful for. An important part of Thanksgiving is families coming together. Extended family members often travel long distances to share the day with their loved ones. In the United States Thanksgiving is the busiest travel day of the year. People travel in planes, trains, buses, and cars to share a very special meal - Thanksgiving dinner. What most Thanksgiving celebrations have in common is the food.

On Thanksgiving many families prepare large, elaborate dinners to share with friends and loved ones. Many of these dinners use ingredients associated with the fall harvest, like cranberries, potatoes, sweet potatoes, corn, and blueberries. Roast turkey is the traditional meat served. It is so common that some people call Thanksgiving Day "Turkey Day". The turkey is usually served with gravy and stuffing. Pies are usually served for dessert. The most common pies served are sweet potato, apple, pecan, and pumpkin.

Thanksgiving is not just celebrated in the privacy of people's homes. Every year the President of the United States pardons a turkey, saving it from becoming someone's meal. In New York City, Macy's, a department store, holds a large parade with huge balloons of various cartoon characters floating down the street.

20. Lottery – A Chance at Millions

In the United States, 43 states, Washington D.C., Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, all have their own lottery. A lottery is used for states to raise money. Licensed stores sell numbered tickets, or people can pay to choose their own numbers. When you let a machine pick your numbers, it is usually called a Quick Pick. Many people play lucky numbers, numbers associated with birthdates or other important numbers to them. The money earned from selling lottery tickets goes to pay for schools, roads, bridges, and other public services. Once a week or more, a drawing is held where the numbers are randomly picked. If your ticket has those numbers, you could win a cash prize.

There are different types of lotteries, such as Powerball, Mega Millions, and Lotto. Powerball and Mega Millions are known for their large payouts. There are also instant lottery tickets that are scratch-off cards. The winnings tend to be less money, but they are extremely popular.

In the United States, you can play the lottery, or buy a ticket if you are 18 years or older.

If you win, usually you have the option of being paid the entire amount in one lump sum or of being paid smaller amounts over a number of years. Lottery winnings are taxable, meaning the amount you actually get is smaller than the jackpot number. People can buy lottery tickets or play the lottery at many convenience stores.

Lotteries are also very popular since they advertise. There are many television commercials, radio commercials, and billboards urging people to play.

Lotteries have been controversial since they are essentially a form of legalized gambling. There is concern that it can lead to people becoming addicted to gambling. There are also illegal lottery games, usually run by some forms of organized crime.

21. One Country, Many Taxes

Taxes are special fees charged by a government on the people who live in a country, state or city. These fees help pay for public services like police, road and bridge repair, and public schools. In the United States people have to pay national, state, and local taxes. Income tax is a tax applied to how much money a person earns in a year. There are both federal and state income taxes. These have to be paid every year by April 15th. There are special forms the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), the government agency in charge of collecting taxes, asks people to fill out. There are tax credits that people with low income, college students, and parents can get. These credits could mean actually getting money back from the government. This money is called a tax refund. People can get both a federal and state tax refund. Anyone who works has to be taxed regardless of the immigration status.

Not paying income taxes could mean a fine or even jail time.

Payroll taxes are taxes that are taken right out of a person's paycheck. There are federal and state payroll taxes. These include Social Security and Medicare taxes. Social Security taxes pay for the retirement and disability benefits received by millions of Americans each year. Medicare taxes pay for the federal health insurance program that covers the elderly and the disabled.

People who own houses pay property taxes. The amount paid depends on how much the property is worth. This tax is usually paid once a year. Sales tax is a tax almost everyone pays. Sales tax is a specific extra percentage charged on nearly all purchases. Everything from soap to furniture has a sales tax attached when bought. The amount of the sales tax is different across states and cities.

22. Medical Insurance – Making it Easier to Get Health Care

Health insurance is one way to pay for health care. Health care includes visits to the doctor, prescription medication, and emergency services. People can pay for medicine and doctor visits directly in cash or they can use health insurance. Health insurance usually means you pay less for these services. There are different types of health insurance. At some jobs, companies offer health insurance plans as part of a benefits package. Individuals can also buy health insurance.

The elderly, and disabled can get government-run health insurance through programs like Medicaid and Medicare. There are many different health insurance companies or plans. Each health plan has a set of doctors they work with. Once a person picks a plan, they pay a premium, which is a fixed amount of money every month. Once in a plan, a person picks a doctor they want to see from that plan. That doctor is the person's primary care provider. Obamacare, or the Affordable Care Act, is a recently passed law that makes it easier for people to get health insurance. The law requires all Americans have health insurance by 2014.

Those that do not get health insurance by the end of the year will have to pay a fine in the form of an extra tax when they file their income taxes. Through Obamacare, people can still get insurance through their jobs, privately, or through Medicaid and Medicare. They can also buy health insurance through state marketplaces, where people can get help choosing a plan based on their income and health care needs. These marketplaces also create an easy way to compare what different plans offer. If people cannot afford to buy health insurance, they may qualify for government programs that offer free health insurance like Medicaid, Medicare or for children, a special program called the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

23. Immigration – A Broken System

Immigration in the United States is a complicated and controversial issue. Since the founding of the country people have come from different countries in search of a better life and opportunities. Immigration laws, however, are always changing and are complicated. This leads to many people coming into the U.S. without proper legal status. While some people call immigrants who come and stay in the U.S. without the proper papers "illegals", many consider this term offensive. The more acceptable term is "undocumented" since they do not have the correct legal documents.

It is estimated that there are more than 11 million undocumented people in the United States. While some people will say there is no reason for immigrants to be undocumented in the U.S., there are limits on the number of Green Cards, or legal permanent resident cards, people from certain countries can get. There are also long waiting lists, up to 14 years in some cases, for people coming from certain countries, to apply for legal status in the U.S. Additionally there are a limited amount of visas, or permits, for people coming into the U.S. with manual labor skills. Millions of undocumented people have been deported, or sent back to their country of origin under President Obama.

In 2013, the U.S. Senate passed an immigration reform bill. The law adds extra border security along the U.S.-Mexico border, and also makes it easier for immigrants to become citizens. The bill, which also has to be approved by the House of Representatives, has not yet been presented or voted on by Congress. Because of this, many are asking President Obama to take action to protect some of the undocumented, many of whom have been in the U.S. for many years and have children that are U.S. citizens.

24. Community Colleges (1)

The American community college system is a place for second chances. Community colleges are two-year schools that thrived in California after the end of World War II. Many American military personnel were returning to civilian life after their service to the country. Some of these young people decided not to go to college after high school so that they could serve their country during that time of need. When they returned, many of them turned to the community college system in California to continue their education. The United States government introduced the G.I. Bill at that time giving returning servicemen and women educational benefits to help them get back to school. Soon community colleges and new school districts began appearing throughout the country. Community colleges helped ease returning military personnel back into college life. It was a low cost, less stressful alternative to going back to a four-year university.

Today, community colleges attract students from all parts of the world. In California, a large population of students comes from Asia and Latin America. These schools provide a second chance to international students who may have experienced difficulties attending college in their native countries. American students who may have not done well academically in high school, and did not enter a university, can turn to community college for a second chance, too.

Community colleges provide a much-needed resource for all these students. Former military personnel, international students, and high school students alike, are all welcome. One of the best things about community colleges is that they accept anyone at anytime. This means people who have not found what they want to do in life can try more than one area of study. If they don't like one course of study, they can always try something else. That is the beauty of community colleges.

25. Community College (2)

These days many people attend community colleges with plans to transfer to a four-year college or university to get a bachelor's degree. It's kind of like a stepping-stone. There are many reasons why people do this. One reason is that some community colleges have transfer agreements with private and state colleges and universities that guarantee admission.

Even if a community college doesn't have that agreement of a guaranteed spot in a four-year college, it has articulation agreements with four-year schools. These agreements tell you exactly what classes a student in a community college needs to take in order to be able to transfer. These agreements make sure that students don't waste time taking classes that won't transfer. Most of these classes one needs to take before transferring are general education classes, like math and English.

Another reason why many students start their undergraduate degree at a community college is a financial one. A four-year college or university is much more expensive than a two-year college. This is especially true for immigrant students, who don't qualify for financial aid, loans or scholarships. Also community colleges tend to offer more evening classes so they can accommodate people who have to work while attending school. They are also a good option for older students with families, who need a more flexible schedule while taking care of children. Community colleges also tend to be commuter schools, meaning people don't have to live on campus in dorms. Attending a community college means you can still live at home with your parents, which can save the family a huge amount of money.

If a student didn't do well in high school, a community college would provide him or her with another opportunity to enter a four-year university. Community colleges offer many classes to help students develop their math and writing skills. When you attend a four-year college, you are expected to have those skills already. Community college will prepare students to successfully graduate from a four-year school.

26. Elementary Schools in the U.S.

Most children in the U.S. begin school at age 5, when they go to kindergarten. This is the beginning of elementary or primary school. Most children stay in elementary schools till they are about 11 years old. Elementary schools are divided by grades. The youngest children begin in kindergarten at 5, and then go to first grade, second grade and so on. Most elementary schools go up to fifth or sixth grade.

The focus of an elementary school is basic academic and socialization skills. Mostly children learn how to read, write, count, add, subtract, multiply, and divide. Students also learn the rules of English grammar, spelling, and vocabulary. Children also learn basic social studies or history, science, art, and music skills, and participate in gym or physical education. In elementary schools children also learn how to follow directions, share, and work in groups.

Students usually stay in one classroom all day with one teacher who stays with them throughout the year. Students may leave the classroom to visit the school library, the school gym, and attend special science, art, and music classes. Students also usually leave the classroom for lunch and recess. For lunch students sit at tables, separated by grade, in a large cafeteria. Recess is usually a half hour when children go out into a yard to play. The typical school day starts at about 8:00 in the morning and ends at about 3:00 p.m. Students go to school from Monday to Friday and have the weekends off.

Elementary school teachers are licensed by the state where they work. They have to graduate from college, or even graduate school taking special classes in Early Childhood and Elementary Education. Before teachers can be in a classroom with students, they have to pass a background check and take an exam.

27. Middle Schools in the U.S.

Once a child finishes 5th or 6th grade in elementary school, they graduate and go on to middle school or junior high school. This school is a separate building or set of buildings. Most students in middle school are between the ages of 10 and 14. The grade system continues in middle school. Middle school usually starts with 6th or 7th grade and ends with 8th grade.

While they are less common, some elementary schools go from kindergarten to 8th grade.

Most students are assigned a middle school based on where they live. However, there are charter, private, and specialized public middle schools that have an application process. The purpose of middle school is to provide a transition period between elementary school and high school. Middle school prepares students for high school life. In middle school students don't stay in one classroom all day with one teacher.

Students change classrooms for different subjects and have different teachers for each subject. In middle school some students may even be able to choose some of their own classes, called electives. There is a set of core classes that all students have to take. These include English, math, science, and social studies or history classes. Gym or physical education classes are also required.

A common feature of middle school is a homeroom, which is a classroom students visit at a scheduled time once a day or once a week. A homeroom teacher takes attendance and makes announcements of things students need to know. The homeroom also helps students feel like there is one common place and one common teacher they see regularly. This is to help with the transition from elementary school to secondary school. Once a student finishes middle school, they have a graduation ceremony and go to a high school assigned to them or a high school they picked.

28. High School in the U.S.

After middle or junior high school, U.S. students go to high school. Going to school is free in the United States, including high schools. Students do not need to pay tuitions, and even textbooks and lunches are free. Of course, we are talking about public schools. If parents choose to send their kids to private schools, they need to pay very expensive tuitions. High school is the last four years of school that students in the U.S. are required to attend by law.

High school students are divided by grades. It begins at 9th grade and finishes with 12th grade. Some high schools, even public high schools, have admission exams or an application process. Public schools admit students based on where they live. In order to successfully complete high school, students have to complete a series of core classes including math, English, science, history, a foreign language, and gym or physical education. Students usually can also choose to take electives, or specialized courses in a subject that interests them. Some high schools in the U.S. have exit exams that students are required to pass in addition to completing their courses in order to graduate and earn a high school diploma. A law called the No Child Left Behind Act requires high schools that get federal money to make students take a standardized exam every year.

A high school diploma is required for students who want to continue on to college and is considered a minimum requirement for any jobs.

High schools classes are designed to prepare students for college. Some high schools offer specialized skills so that students can find work after graduation without going to college. Those are called vocational high schools. In high school, some students have the opportunity to take Advanced Placement (AP) classes. These are college level classes. If the students pass an exam after taking AP classes, they can get college credit. In high school, students move from class to class throughout the school day.

29. Homeschooling

Not every parent looks forward to the day when their child goes off to school. In fact some parents are not sending their students to school at all. Instead they are choosing to teach their children at home. This is called homeschooling. Parents, caregivers, or private tutors educate children individually at home instead of sending them off to be formally educated in public or private schools. In the U.S. only about three percent of children are homeschooled.

There are many reasons why some parents choose to homeschool. One reason is that some parents do not feel their children are safe in school because of bullying and a growing trend of police in school.

Other parents want their child's education to be based on their religion or moral beliefs. Yet other parents feel like the education in school is not good enough. Homeschooling is also seen as a choice for families that live in rural areas, and families that travel, like actors.

There are many different ways to homeschool, and homeschooling allows parents to customize lessons based on their children's needs. Families can purchase textbooks to use or create their own materials. Some parents follow a philosophy called unschooling, which allows a child to determine when, and how they want to learn based on their natural curiosity. Some worry that homeschooling means students won't have opportunities to socialize.

To answer this concern, some families have created cooperatives, where a group of homeschooled students will learn and play together and participate in activities that would normally happen in school like field trips and prom. Being homeschooled doesn't mean a student cannot go to college. Most colleges accept homeschooled students. It is important, however, for parents and students to create a portfolio or proof of what has been learned.

30. Parent-Teacher Conferences

When parents send their children to school, often they don't know what happens day to day. Parents rely on what their children tell them about how they are doing and what they are learning. Generally schools will host parent-teacher conferences at least twice a year.

Parent-teacher conferences are short meetings between parents and their children's teachers. Usually parent-teacher conferences are held when teachers give out a student's grades for the term. The parent-teacher conferences give teachers an opportunity to let parents know how their child is doing. A teacher will let a parent know the student's strengths and bring to the parent's attention any problems with grades or behavior. The meetings also offer parents the opportunity to ask questions and see what their child is learning.

When it is almost time for parent-teacher conferences, the school will send parents a note and usually give them an appointment time. There are appointments during the day and in the evening. Evening appointments are used for parents who work during the day. Parent-teacher conferences do not last very long. Normally they do not last longer than 10 minutes. This is why it is important for parents to make sure they arrive at their appointments on time and come prepared with questions.

If a parent needs more than 10 minutes, he or she should try to schedule another meeting with the teacher. Keeping a teacher for more than 10 minutes when there are parents waiting is disrespectful.

Most children do not go along with their parents to the meetings. This allows both the parent and teacher to talk honestly about the child's progress without making the child feel bad. Usually a teacher will offer advice to the parent on how to support their child's education.

31. Private Schools – An Expensive Educational Alternative

Public schools are available for kids from kindergarten through 12th grade free of charge. However, many families choose to pay for their children's primary and secondary education by sending them to private schools. There are many different types of private schools and many different reasons why parents send their kids there. Some private schools are military type and yet others are boarding schools where students live on campus. Some private schools are affiliated with a certain religion. These schools teach a specific faith's beliefs and traditions as well as the regular academic subjects. There are schools run by Catholics, Protestants, Jewish people, Muslims, and Orthodox Christians. There are also private schools that specialize in teaching disabled students.

Some parents choose private schools because they feel that they offer a better education than public schools; others choose private schools because they offer a different type of curriculum. Waldorf Schools, for example, only let children play and use items made of natural materials.

Private schools are also called independent schools or non-state schools because they are not run by local, state, or national governments. They can pick what students to go to their schools. They do this through admission examinations and interviews. There is often an admissions application. Some private schools accept anyone who can pay tuition to send their children there. Some schools charge up to \$45,000 a year. Private schools charge tuition because they do not get any money collected from local, state, and national taxes. Some private schools offer a limited number of scholarships to help pay for school. Many of these scholarships are need-based, meaning for students who can't afford the tuition. Other scholarships are offered for students with very good grades or for students that have a talent in a sport or art.

32. The California College and University System

California is the largest state in the United States of America. It is home to more than 10 percent of the country's total population. It also has the largest education system in the country. The college and university system is divided into four parts.

Those parts are the University of California system, the California State University system, the community college system, and private institutions. The UC system has more than 230,000 students at its 10 Campuses. It is considered the more prestigious system in the state. It includes top universities like UC Berkeley, and the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Both schools rank in the top 25 universities in the country, with Berkeley in the top 10. A degree from the UC system is highly sought, and the academic standards are higher than the other systems. They are also more expensive.

The California State Universities counts 23 universities in its system. It is a diversified system that includes two polytechnic universities, and a maritime university. These schools offer vocational and maritime education, but also offer traditional, academic programs. The systems enrollment is approximately 450,000 students, with about 45,000 faculty members.

The California Community Colleges system is the largest systems of higher education in the state, and the world. It boasts 112 campuses, and serves approximately 2.4 million students. It offers transfer degrees, vocational training, and associates degree programs.

California is also home to a large number of privately owned and operated schools. These schools have no ties to the state school system, but some do accept transfer students from community colleges.

The most notable and prestigious schools in the state are Stanford University, in Palo Alto, and the University of Southern California, in Los Angeles.

33. Driving in the United States

Driving in the U.S. can be confusing not just because of all the rules and laws that drivers must follow, but also because of driving customs. Many people in the U.S. are really dependent on their cars to get to work and school. In fact most American workers spend an hour driving to work each day. In order to drive in the U.S., you have to go to your local Department of Motor Vehicles first, and take a written test to get your learner's permit. If you pass this test, you can practice driving so you can pass a road test and get your license.

The Department of Motor Vehicles or DMV has free booklets you can go and get to study for your learner's permit. You can also access the information online and even take a practice written exam. To prepare for the road test, you can have a friend teach you to drive or pay to take classes at a driving school. You cannot, however, practice driving by yourself. If you are caught driving with only a learner's permit, you can get into trouble with the law.

Once you get your driver's license in one state, you can use it to drive in all of the United States. Wherever you drive, you will see signs posted along the road indicating the speed limit. These numbers are not a suggestion. Generally you can drive faster on a highway than on local streets. Local police use special equipment to detect your speed. If they detect you are speeding or driving over the speed limit, police can stop you and give you a ticket. You will have to pay a fine, and some of the fines are more than \$100. The lines painted on the road are not just to keep cars in their lanes. They send a message. For example, a double solid yellow line means that it is against the law to pass another car here.

34. Pasadena Rose Parade

Each New Year's Day, the city of Pasadena in California hosts a celebration to welcome the year with a series of events that includes the Rose Parade. The parade takes place in the center of the city on Colorado Blvd, and features numerous floats, marching bands, equestrian teams, celebrities, and honorees. It is the most popular parade in the country. It has spawned several other New Year's Day parades throughout the country. In Miami, it's the Orange Bowl Parade; in New Orleans, it is the Sugar Bowl Parade; in Arizona, it's called the Fiesta Bowl Parade. However, the Rose Parade is the oldest and best parade.

Many people like to camp out in tents or in sleeping bags the night before to get the best locations to view the Rose Parade.

To brave the cold weather, some people bring portable heaters to keep them warm. It can get into the low 40s at night in Pasadena during the winter, so many people dress warm for the occasion. Food is another big feature at the pre-parade celebration on New Year's Eve. People bring their portable grills to cook their favorite outdoor meals right on the sidewalk. The rich aroma of the grilling food fills the night air, and most people are willing to share their food with other overnight campers. It is fun to sample different dishes from other grillers.

As night turns into morning, there is still electricity in the air. People are excited about the start of the parade, which begins at 8 a.m. sharp. The floats are beautifully decorated in flowers, while the dancers and other performers dress in colorful costumes, some of which are made just for the parade. The marching bands come from nearby cities, high schools, and colleges. It is considered a great honor to participate in the Rose Parade.

35. Selfies

The self-portrait is nothing new. Painters and photographers have always used themselves as subjects. Today, however, almost everyone walks around with a camera in his or her pocket. This is because most cell phones have cameras on them. The fact that most people have cell phone cameras with them all the time has led to the rise of the selfie. A selfie is a self-portrait usually taken with a cell phone.

Since the pictures are usually taken on a cell phone, many people tend to share these photographs with friends and even strangers on different social networking websites. Some of the popular social networking platforms people use to share selfies include Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook.

People usually take selfies when they are engaged in normal day-to-day activities. They take selfies of their commutes to work or school. People take selfies of themselves eating. Other people take selfies to show what they are wearing or whom they are hanging out with.

The most common way to take a selfie is by holding a cell phone at arm's length. Some people take selfies by taking a picture of their reflection in a mirror. In these pictures, you can usually see the phone the person is taking a picture with. Selfies taken using a mirror often are taken in a bathroom, which some people think is offensive. The bathroom is a very private place, not a place to take pictures.

Some people think that selfies are a sign that people are becoming vain or superficial. It is not often that people take pictures of themselves that make them look bad. When people take pictures of themselves, they usually are trying to present themselves in the best light. However, some people use selfies to show what they really look like. Some people are trying to challenge stereotypes of what makes someone attractive.

36. Apartment Pets

In U.S. cities like New York City and Los Angeles, many people live in small apartments. Despite not having homes with big yards, some apartment dwellers still seek the companionship that domesticated animals like dogs and cats offer. Some people feel that having a pet, even in a small space, is good for teaching children responsibility.

However, many landlords forbid tenants from having pets, specifically cats and dogs, because of the damage the animals can do to carpets. Some landlords even forbid birds because of the noise they make. Many landlords charge an extra fee, known as a pet deposit, to tenants who want to keep pets. This is to pay for repairs or cleaning caused by the pet.

Many times apartment dwellers will choose animals, like fish, hermit crabs, guinea pigs or hamsters, that make little noise, little mess, and won't chew up the furniture.

Other people keep lizards as pets, since they don't require much space and can be kept in small cages or tanks. Another benefit of these smaller pets is that they don't need to be walked. However, some people who live in apartments have pets that are not so ordinary. Some of these less than ordinary pets include mammals like hedgehogs, amphibians like frogs, and spiders like tarantulas. Not all exotic pets are legal though.

In order to maintain public safety, some cities and states have laws banning specific animals as pets. New York City, for example, bans people from keeping ferrets, snapping turtles, pythons, and scorpions as pets. It seems unlikely that a family would have a polar bear named Fluffy or a whale named Bubbles as a pet, New York City has specific laws banning these wild animals from residences. These laws exist for a good reason. In 2003, a man in a Manhattan apartment was discovered to have a 350-pound Bengal tiger as a pet.

37. Non-traditional Wakes

A wake is when people go to a deceased person's home or a funeral parlor to pay their last respects. A funeral parlor is a place where the preparation of the corpse for burial takes place. Part of the preparation can be dressing the deceased, doing their makeup, and placing them in a coffin for people to see.

Some people do have a closed casket wake, where you can't see the dead person; some people are not even choosing coffins for their dearly departed loved ones.

In the United States, more and more families are choosing not to have traditional wakes. There is a recent trend of people having non-traditional wakes with the deceased person posed doing something they loved doing when they were alive. For example, a family in New Orleans had their dead loved one posed at a table with a cigarette between her fingers and a can of beer. One funeral home in Puerto Rico has become famous for its non-traditional wakes.

It all started in 2008, when a family asked for their dead loved one to be propped up against the wall of their home for the wake. When a paramedic died, his family had his dead body in the driver's seat of an ambulance. Another family had a man propped up in a fake boxing ring for his wake. One dead man was posed on top of his motorcycle. Recently, a grandmother was posed sitting in her rocking chair.

These non-traditional wakes have their critics though. Some people think they are disrespectful. They think of death as a solemn and sad occasion, not a time to pose the dead as if they were toys. Fans feel it helps them remember the dead as they were when they were alive.

38. Homelessness in Los Angeles

It is very common to see homeless people on the streets of Los Angeles. This is a problem that has persisted in the city since the beginning of the 20th century. Back in that time, California was known for offering many job opportunities in farming, and many young men were hopping on trains from all over the country to arrive in Los Angeles. Unfortunately, many of those men often ended up finding themselves without a job, a place to stay, or even food to eat. To help these people, many churches began to establish shelters in the area of Los Angeles that would eventually become Downtown. Even as the farm landscape changed to a big city environment, these shelters remained a refuge for many individuals that found themselves homeless

Nowadays, the homeless population of Los Angeles is made up of much more than just young men looking for work. Many economic and social changes have resulted in both men and women of all ages turning to the streets of Los Angeles. Some of them are there as a result of substance abuse that has left them moneyless and jobless. Others are veterans from various wars that cannot find the resources to get back to their normal lives. Additionally, many of these people suffer from mental disabilities that limit them from finding a job or being accepted in the rest of society.

Since there are a lot of different causes that lead to homelessness, it is easy to see why finding solutions to helping all of the homeless people is so difficult. Although there are many programs that focus on providing the homeless food daily, it is much harder to find programs that try to assist the homeless in finding jobs, and stable housing. In order to finally find a solution that will effectively help decrease the number of homeless people in the city, a lot more individualized attention must be placed on individuals based on their physical and mental health, and circumstance.

39. Paramedics

Some of the everyday heroes in the United States are the country's paramedics. These young men and women are usually the first people who respond to medical emergencies suffered by citizens. Paramedics must complete a very extensive physical training program that is designed to weed out those who cannot make the cut. A paramedic must be in fit condition, and be mentally strong to perform his or her duties in the face of danger. Many of these heroes must endure life-threatening situations when responding to emergencies. Paramedics are usually attached to a county, or city fire department, but there are also some private paramedic organizations.

In Southern California, there are two primary schools for paramedic training. They are UCLA's Daniel Freeman Paramedic program and the Paramedic Training Institute. Both of these schools provide candidates for the Los Angeles County and City Fire Departments. To become a paramedic for a county or city organization, candidates must also pass a psychological screening and a physical training program.

Some of the equipment paramedics carry is very specialized. They carry basic and advanced life support gear such as forcible entry tools so they can reach people in peril, saws to cut through obstacles, and other emergency equipment. Paramedics provide a valuable service to the communities they serve. They must be certified in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) techniques, and be trained to handle all situations.

Some paramedics are trained to respond to what is called Mass Casualty Incidents (MCI). These emergencies occur whenever there is a tragic event such as the September 11, 2001 attacks on the country, and other emergencies like earthquakes, mudslides, or floods. Paramedics can also be sent to emergency situations by citizens who call the 911 emergency phone number.

40. September 11th

One of the darkest days in American history was September 11, 2001. This is "a day that will live in infamy" for most Americans. It was the most tragic day in the history of the country since December 7, 1941 when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. September 11th was the day Muslim extremists hijacked four commercial airliners in an attempt to destroy the American spirit by slamming those jets into four buildings. Three of the four jets reached their targets, while one was stopped by a group of everyday heroes who gave their lives for their country.

In the early morning hours on September 11, 2001, American Airlines Flight 11 slammed into the north tower of the World Trade Center in New York City. A few minutes later, Flight 175, also an American Airlines flight, struck the south tower. Both suicide attacks brought the towers down, but not immediately. It took time for the extreme heat from the burning jet fuel to weaken the towers to their eventual collapse. At about the same time, American Airlines, Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon, which is a government building in the country's capitol, Washington D.C.

The fourth flight, United Airlines Flight 93, was also headed for the capitol city. Most people think its target was either the capitol building, or the White House, the president's home.

A group of brave passengers, upon hearing the news of what was happening in the country, decided to take down the giant airplane even though they knew they would not survive. They stormed the cockpit and took the controls from the hijackers. The plane flew out of control, crashing into a field in the state of Pennsylvania, where all passengers were killed.

In all, about 3,000 Americans lost their lives on that day, but the American spirit was not suppressed. Those responsible for the attacks were quickly dealt with, and the country soon began its journey to recovery. September 11, 2001, a day America will never forget.

41. The California Redwoods and Giant Sequoias

Some of the most majestic landscape views in California are the great California Redwood and Sequoia trees. These trees can be seen up close at Sequoia National Park in the southern Sierra Nevada mountain range, of Visalia. This central California region boasts more than 400,000 acres of natural beauty that is uniquely Californian. The park is known as the Land of the Giants because of its beautiful trees. The landscape features great mountains, foothills, deep canyons, a large cavern system, and, of course, the world's largest trees.

The park sits side by side with King's Canyon National Park in the stunning San Joaquin Valley. Sequoia National Park was officially established as a national park in the 1890s.

It features 14 campsites that include picnic tables, fire rings for outdoor cooking, and food storage boxes. It is a great place for a family vacation with many of its campsites open year round. But the most popular attractions are its forests. The ancient trees are some of the oldest living organisms on earth, and draw millions of visitors worldwide. Redwood trees can reach heights of more than 375 feet.

They are closely related to the Giant Sequoia trees, and are often mistaken for each other. They both are uniquely Californian, as they do not grow naturally in any other region in the world.

Redwood trees live up to 2,000 years, and have branches that grow up to five feet in diameter. Its bark can grow up to 12 inches thick. The Giant Sequoia trees can live up to an astonishing 3,000 years, and have branches up to eight feet in diameter. Its bark can grow to an amazing thickness of three feet. Both trees have dark brown bark, and look very similar, but the Redwood thrives in coastal climate, while the Sequoia exists in more mountainous areas. In either case, they are a must-see California attraction.

42. The California Highway Patrol

There are many law enforcement agencies in the United States, and especially in California. Some of the largest agencies in Southern California are the Los Angeles Police Department, and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

Both of these police forces are some of the largest in the country. They handle a full-range of police duties ranging from traffic citations to murder, rape, and robbery cases. There are also a number of smaller police agencies operating side by side with the LAPD and L.A. County Sheriff's Department. Cities, such as Monterey Park, have their own police force, while smaller cities depend on the Sheriff's Department for their law enforcement needs. Because of the unique nature of the state, California created the California Highway Patrol.

The CHP, as it is usually called, is a police agency that is entrusted with patrolling the vast number of freeway miles that exist in California. The state was built during a time of great mobility after the advent of the personal vehicle. Because of this, the state has more freeway miles than any other states in the United States with the exception of Texas. However, California has the most licensed drivers, and by far, the most registered vehicles. This made it necessary to create a police force dedicated to its highways.

CHP officers are endowed with the same powers other police officers have. However, they do not have a crime investigation team for any offense other than traffic-related crimes. Whenever the CHP first responds to a crime that is not traffic-related, its officers perform the same duties a regular officer does.

It then turns investigations over to the LAPD, or Sheriff's office depending on the location of the crime. The CHP has a long, and storied history. Many young Californians, both male and female, are attracted to the CHP, and enroll into its academy in Sacramento, the state's capital.

43. The Golden Gate Bridge

One of the most beautiful, and recognizable California landmarks is the Golden Gate Bridge in the city of San Francisco. The bridge spans the San Francisco Bay, and is part of a network of five main bridges that cross the bay in the San Francisco and Oakland area. The region with its bay has one of the most breathtaking views in the world, and part of which is the historic Golden Gate Bridge.

It is perhaps the most iconic and recognizable landmark in the entire United States. Construction on the bridge began in 1933, while the country was deeply mired in the Great Depression. Many people think the bridge was, in large part, responsible for the country's economic recovery because of the number of workers employed. The material used to build the bridge also contributed to the manufacturing, distribution, and transportation.

The bridge connects San Francisco to the San Francisco peninsula in Marin County through both California State Route 1, and U.S. Route 101.

Before the bridge was built, the only way to get from one location to the other was to go around the bay, or to take a ferry across. Construction of the bridge was controversial at the time. Many thought the project was simply too complex, expensive, and dangerous to build. The construction plan approved concentrated on safety for the workers who would be involved in the construction, and it worked well until February 17, 1937. Remarkably, only one worker had died up to that date, but on that date, a scaffolding collapsed killing 10 men in the tragic accident.

The bridge was completed later that year, and has been in use ever since. It is one of California's great landmarks with people from all over the world drawn to see it.

44.The San Francisco Cable Cars

One of the most historic, and significant landmarks in the United States is the San Francisco cable car system. It is the world's only, manually operated cable car system. It is run by the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency. The system dates back to 1878, when the California Street line first opened. In all, there are three lines currently operating in the city, and boasts a fleet of 12 cable cars. There used to be 23 lines in use throughout the city connecting the diverse communities that make up San Francisco. The open-air cars are a major tourist attraction, and are still used by San Francisco commuters on a daily basis.

The simple reason cable cars were first used in the city was because of its landscape. San Francisco is very hilly, which makes it impossible for municipal buses to scale. The solution for this problem was the cable car. These cars are literally pulled by cable, up and down the steep hills of the city, making it easier for people to get from one end of the city to the other. There are two types of cars in use today. Single-ended cars and double-ended cars. The single-ended cars have open-sided sections with seats that face outward to the street. The rear section of these cars is enclosed with seats facing the interior of the car. These cars seat 29 passengers. They travel in both directions by using a swivel-based turntable that turns the car at the end of the line. The double-ended cars are a bit larger, and can hold up to 68 passengers. It has 34 seats, and grips for an additional 34 standing passengers. The best feature of these cars is the pure fun they are to ride. People who ride the San Francisco cable cars are stepping into part of California's history.

45. Car Chase Television

Car chases in the Los Angeles area are a fairly regular occurrence. In 2013 there were over 700 car chases. Car chases also have become a source of entertainment. Many car chases are captured on video and broadcast live as they are happening. No one has to wait until the six o'clock news comes on anymore to find out about what happened.

People can tune in to their local broadcast television station and see it happening in real time. These car chases are often captured with the help of a news channel's helicopter. The helicopter follows and films the chase through the streets, reporting what streets the cars are passing through.

People like watching car chases for many reasons. They are intense, and filled with drama. A viewer never knows what will happen next. Will the driver give up easily? Does the driver have a weapon? Will the driver get into an accident? Will someone crossing the street get hit? Tune in to find out! Many channels see their ratings soar when they air car chases. They are just giving the people what they want.

Police are not always happy with the media covering car chases live on the air. Police worry that people trying to escape enjoy the attention. Police feel that broadcasting car chases encourages people to escape. Police also worry that the attention brings innocent bystanders to the street. Someone could get hurt. The media insists they have the right to show car chases. They feel they are informing the public.

Car chases happen for many reasons. Sometimes police will chase someone who stole a car. Other times the police may try to do a routine traffic stop. However, the driver with the broken taillight may have a warrant for arrest, so off he drives.

46. Los Angeles Coroner's Office

In Los Angeles, places associated with death are often popular. One such popular place is the Department of Medical Examiner-Coroner. When someone dies and the cause of death is undetermined or suspicious, the body is brought here for examination. It is the coroner's job to determine the time, cause, and manner of death. Sometimes the coroner will have to perform an autopsy, which is like an operation on a dead body to try to figure out how the person died. One of the reasons the L.A. Coroner's Office is so popular is because of the number of famous people who have been examined there. Some of those people include Marilyn Monroe, Robert F. Kennedy, Michael Jackson, and Whitney Houston.

The Los Angeles Coroner's Office is so popular that there is even a gift shop where visitors can buy items like shirts, caps, and mugs with the Coroner's logo on them. One tee-shirt people can buy even says, "Our bodies of work speak for themselves". They even sell beach towels with body outlines. The store is open five days a week. They also have a website and a paper catalog for those who are not close enough to visit. The Coroner's Office claims the purpose of the store is to tell people how fragile life is and to create awareness and responsibility toward one's actions. Some people feel that having a store in the same place where dead people are is disrespectful.

There have been a number of television shows about the L.A. Coroner's Office. Some of these are reality TV shows featuring what workers really do there. An example is called "Death Detectives". Other shows are fictional like "Quincy M.E." The M.E. stands for medical examiner, the person who performs the autopsies.

47. Museum Mile in New York City

On one of New York City's most famous avenues, Fifth Avenue, is Museum Mile. Museum Mile is a 23-block stretch that holds some of the most famous museums in the world. Museum Mile begins at 85th Street and Fifth Avenue with the massive Metropolitan Museum of Art. Inside is thousands of years worth of art and artifacts. A visitor can visit an entire Egyptian tomb, sit in a Japanese style garden, view Renaissance paintings, and ancient Greek and Roman sculptures. There is even a gallery featuring musical instruments. In the summer, there is a rooftop garden where there are spectacular views of the city, especially of Central Park.

The Guggenheim, on 88th Street and Fifth Avenue, looks a little bit like a snail's shell from the outside. When it opened in the 1950's, the swirling architecture, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, was thought to be ugly by many. This museum focuses on modern art, but sometimes features special exhibits like one they had a few years ago of ancient Mexican ruins. The

National Academy Museum and School of Fine Arts on 91st Street and Fifth Avenue is the city's oldest art school, dating back to 1825. The Jewish Museum on 93rd Street and Fifth Avenue, tells 4,000 years worth of Jewish History. Up ten blocks on 103rd Street and Fifth Avenue is the Museum of the City of New York, showcasing the history of the Big Apple from its colonial start.

One block up on 104th Street and Fifth Avenue is El Museo del Barrio. This museum started as a space to reflect the city's large Puerto Rican migrant community. Now it features exhibits focusing on art from all over Latin America. Across the avenue is the Central Park Conservatory Garden, with a fountain that has a sculpture of three dancing life-size women.

48. A Building for the Empire State

The Empire State Building may be the most famous building in New York City. It is called the Empire State Building because New York State is called the Empire State. It is 1,454 feet tall. Many people think it is the tallest building in the world. This was true when it was built in 1931. In 1970, when the World Trade Center was built, that became the tallest building. Now, the Empire State Building is the fourth tallest building in the U.S. and the 23rd tallest in the world. Inside the building is mostly occupied by offices and stores.

People can go to the top of the building, where there is an observation deck. From the top there are beautiful views of New York City, especially at night. Most people take one of 73 elevators to the top. It takes less than one minute by elevator to get to the 80th floor. That is where there is a gift shop. Some people walk 1,860 steps to the top. Every year there is even a race, with people competing to see who can walk up to the top the fastest.

The landmark is not just famous because of its height. In 1945, a small plane crashed into it. More than 30 people have tried to kill themselves by jumping off the building. In 1933 it was featured in the movie King Kong, where a giant gorilla climbs to the top and falls to his death after being attacked by airplanes. The building was also in the movie Sleepless in Seattle with Tom Hanks.

At night, the top of the Empire State Building is lit up in different colors. It is red and green on Christmas, red for Lunar New Year, and blue for Hanukkah. On the Fourth of July it is red, white, and blue.

49. The Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World

Most people don't know that the full name of the Statue of Liberty is "The Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World". She is a symbol of freedom, especially for many immigrants. When many immigrants came to the United States in the late 1800s, Lady Liberty in New York Harbor was a sign to tell them that they had made it to America.

Inside the base of the statue there is a plaque with a famous poem written on it. The poem is "The New Colossus" by Emma Lazarus. Many immigrants feel this poem speaks to them the reasons they came to America. One line of the poem is: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free". Lady Liberty was not always green. She used to be copper colored, but the years have caused the copper that the statue is made of to change color.

The 151-foot tall sculpture was a 100th birthday gift from France to the United States in 1886. It is located on Liberty Island right off the southern tip of Manhattan, New York City. The only way to get there is to take a ferry. Inside the base of the statue is a museum. To get to the crown, people have to climb 377 steps up a double spiral staircase from the feet of the statue. There is no elevator. People need to be in good shape to climb to the top. People used to be able to climb up to the torch of the statue, but it was shut down because it was too easy to fall off.

About four million people visit the Statue of Liberty every year. People who can't go to New York can see replicas in Las Vegas and other parts of the world.

50. Rockefeller Center – Top of the Rock

Rockefeller Center is a complex of 19 buildings. It is named for a famous New York City business magnate, John D. Rockefeller, who built the group of buildings from 1930-1939. The most famous building in the complex is the General Electric building where NBC television studios are based. It is smack in the middle of Manhattan, New York City, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues and between 48th and 51st Streets. The address of the GE building is 30 Rockefeller Plaza. That's how the show "30 Rock" got its name. The show was filmed there. Saturday Night Live, a popular American late night show, is also filmed there. Visitors can get tickets to see a show being taped and can also tour the studios.

Visitors to Rockefeller Center can visit the plaza, which becomes an ice skating rink in the winter. Every year a huge Christmas tree is placed there and thousands of people attend the tree lighting ceremony, which always features famous singers. In the spring, summer, and fall, the plaza becomes a cafe. In the middle of the plaza is a statue of the Greek god Prometheus. His myth states that he brought fire to the world. 200 flags from all countries of the United Nations surround the plaza.

Radio City Music Hall is another famous building in Rockefeller Center.

Many musicians give concerts here, but it is best known as the home of the Rockettes, a dance company named for Rockefeller Center. They are famous for their kick lines and are best known for performing in the Radio City Christmas Spectacular, an annual musical holiday stage show.
